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Israelis Say U.S. Lags In Probe of Iran Deal

Sources Say CIA Channeled Contra Funds

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JERUSALEM, Nov. 27—U.S. federal investigators have made no attempt to question the Israeli government or private Israeli citizens in the Justice Department's investigation of the secret channeling to Nicaraguan rebels of profits from American arms sales to Iran, Israeli officials said today, adding that Israel is prepared to cooperate with the probe if asked.

"There has been no request made for our cooperation," said a senior Israeli official who asked not to be identified. "But if we are asked, I presume we would attempt to cooperate because we have nothing to hide in this matter."

The official noted that in the case of Jonathan J. Pollard, a U.S. naval intelligence employee charged with spying for Israel, the Israeli government allowed Justice Department investigators to travel here and question several officials allegedly involved in the affair who had access to documents. Pollard later was convicted of espionage and is awaiting sentencing.

"The cooperation in the Pollard case was done by special arrangement, and it would have to be in this case too," the official said.

Meanwhile, Israeli sources, seeking to rebut charges in Washington that Israel played a role in funneling money from the Iran arms sales to the contras, added some details to a blanket denial issued yesterday in which the government stated it had no knowledge of or involvement in the payments to the contras.

The sources insisted that it was the CIA, not Israeli representatives, that opened the secret Swiss bank account into which money from the sales was deposited earlier this year. They also contended that the price for the arms had been determined by Iranian middleman Manuchehr Ghorbanifar, who made all arrangements, including opening letters of credit to pay for the transactions, and took a commission on the sales.

"There was no involvement with any Israeli official or private individual in either opening the account or depositing the money," said an informed source. "Iranian counter-

parts made all the arrangements with Tehran. They got the money and paid it into the account, and what the CIA did with it was nobody else's business."

Ghorbanifar is a business associate of Adnan Khashoggi, a multimillionaire Saudi Arabian businessman and arms merchant who has maintained contacts with Israel's former prime minister Shimon Peres for at least six years. It was Khashoggi and Ghorbanifar who made the first contacts in Europe with Israeli arms merchant Yaacov Nimrodi that led to Israeli involvement in the arms deal, sources said.

The two men asked Nimrodi's help in approaching the United States to seek support for pro-western military officers in Tehran in an internal power struggle against radicals. He went to the Israeli government, which in turn approached the White House. Each side demanded a show of good faith from the other, sources said, with the Iranians insisting upon U.S. shipments of antitank and antiaircraft missiles and military spare parts while the Americans demanded the release of U.S. hostages held by a pro-Iranian Shiite Moslem group in Lebanon. That began the controversial exchange of arms for hostages.

The Jerusalem Post today quoted unnamed U.S. officials in Washington who said they believed Khashoggi, operating on behalf of the Saudi government, had partially financed the arms sales to Iran and had played "a direct role" in funneling the profits to the contras. Israeli sources confirmed Khashoggi's involvement in arranging the arms deals but said they could not implicate him in the contra connection.

[The Saudi Arabian government today denied U.S. press reports of Khashoggi's involvement as "planted lies." The Associated Press reported from Riyadh. A dispatch from the official Saudi Press Agency, referring to reports earlier this week in The Washington Post and New York Times, said the government regretted "speculation attributed to unidentified American and Israeli sources." Saudi Arabia professes neutrality in the Iran-Iraq

war but reportedly supplies financial assistance to Iraq.]

Israeli elder statesman Abba Eban, chairman of the Knesset's foreign affairs and defense committee, today sharply criticized Israel's role in the arms dealings.

Speaking to Israel radio from Ottawa, Eban said Israel has no enemy more dangerous than the Moslem fundamentalist regime

of Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. "We shouldn't have sold them so much as a broken typewriter," he said.

He was also sharply critical of Peres, a political ally of Eban and now Israel's foreign minister, for not disclosing the Israeli role in the arms deal to his Knesset committee, which under law has oversight powers on security matters.

He said it was "totally inadequate" that Peres had kept the sales secret from the panel and demanded that he give the panel a detailed accounting of the sales when it meets again next Tuesday.